San Marcos Free Press.

I. H. JULIAN, Editor.

PUBLISHED EVERY SATURDAY.

COOPER TIM.

BY AUGUST LARNED.

Cooper Tim was a large-headed little man, with a certain pleasantness of face that can hardly be analyzed. For Tim had none of the fatal gift of beauty; and yet a certain genial goodness did ray out of his homely features, although he was the most taciturn of human beings.

There was an ingenious theory current among the neighbors that Tim had been stunted, when a boy, by the too vigorous arm of his mother, who was unaccustomed to spare the rod. There was another theory, precisely contrary, to the effect that his mother had beaten him in order to bring out the brightness which must somewhere be latent in Tim's constitution; but, instead of producing the desired result, the boy had sunk into unfathomable deeps of silence.

His mother in time went the way of all flesh, and Tim came into possession of a shop, and a little dwelling-house hard by, which he rented to a quiet family, taking his meals with the tenants and lodging in a small room back of the shop. Here he lived and worked from day to day, minding his own business and thinking no evil. He labored diligently on barrels, casks, butter-tubs, sap-buckets, any thing that came to his hand. Sometimes he went to the woods, to engage in what he called getting out "stuff." When he was coopering a large hogshead, the little man was obliged to mount on a sort of platform to set the staves and adjust the hoops. Then the children from the village school would peep in at the shop-door, as if it had been a penny show. And Tim would gladly have spoken to them, for he liked their bright eyes and rosy cheeks; but never a word could he find to say for himself, and when his large, bushy head came furtively up over the edge of the cask, like Jack-in-the-box, they all scampered away.

Strange to say, Tim had been paying attention to a young woman, by name Amanda Ainslie, for several years. She lived in the next township, and the little cooper did not see her very often; but it was well understood among the neighbors that Tim and 'Mandy were "keeping company," and that old Mrs. Ainslie, 'Mandy's mother, did not approve the match. She had no liking, it was said, for the kind of "dumb, driven cattle" to which Tim belonged; but preferred a man for her daughter who could speak up for himself and assert the fact that his soul was his own.

The neighbors, furthermore, declared that Tim would never have made advances to a mortal woman, for he stood in extreme awe of the sex, had not 'Mandy done the courting. Once, at a picnic, seeing him unnoticed and alone, she had spoken a few kind words to Tim, which sank into his heart. Perhaps, before that, with a girl's quick eye, she had noticed the pleasantness that did ray forth from the little cooper, in spite of his still tongue.

'Mandy was not a beauty; but she had a fresh, wholesome face and an abundance of flaxen hair. She was a good-hearted girl and a great talker, and this gift of speech was a constant source of wonder and delight to Tim. He would sit beside her by the hour spell-bound with admiration, while 'Mandy poured forth her easy chat. In his lonely hours, while busy with adze and hatchet, he pondered over the mystery of how 'Mandy did it; how she could cut a clean swath of talk right through the most tangled field of topics. And he looked upon 'Mandy's accomplishment with awe, as upon some intricate piece of coopering, of which he was quite unable to get the hang.

How 'Mandy perceived the nature of her admirer I know not; but, doubtless, she rejoiced in him as in a perfect listener, and fell into the way of sitting by him at country gatherings and having him named as her "beau." Tim paid an occasional visit to her home, several miles distant, although old lady Ainslie doomed his horse to that uncomfortable fodder called post-meal and had never asked him to partake of a meal in her house. The pretexts for these visits were certain little presents which Tim, in his leisure hours, had fashioned for 'Mandy out of hard wood. He owned a small turning-lathe and was ingenious in contriving work-boxes, napkin-rings, and thread-reels, which he produced one by one and slipped into the work-table of his lady-love, as if he had been committing felony.

The situation had been somewhat complicated within the last two or three years by the appearance of a rival, Joshua Holly, a small farmer, who lived several miles nearer 'Mandy than Tim did and had made good use of his opportunities. Joshua wished to secure a notable housekeeper and a good butter and cheese-maker for his small dairy. An amiable wife, with these qualifications, he thought, would be almost as valuable to him as a good cow. 'Mandy for a long time had no idea of marrying Joshua; but she was willing to use him as a spur in the side of her slow lover.

But Tim was too simple-minded to be jealous. He thought within himself that Josh was a big talker, and 'Mandy could never endure to have her precious privilege trenched upon. Besides, Josh had but a small, scrubby farm, only half paid for; while Tim's cottage and shop were one of the nicest places to be found and entirely unencumbered. 'Mandy would be a little queen there, and quite free from the drudgery of the farm.

This courting business had gone on seven years. 'Mandy was over 30 and Tim was verging toward 40. Although the lady had thrown out certain hints as to her desires and hopes, she was a monument of patience, and protected her dilatory lover to the best of her ability against her mother's sharp attacks. During the seven years' courting it had often occurred to Tim that he must come to the point sooner or later. Then the roulade of quick blows on the side of some cask or barrel would cease for a moment, and the little cooper would feel a queer giving way in his frame, while perspiration broke out upon him, as the great change from single blessedness to the marriage state was presented to his mind.

But there came a day early one spring when the poet tells us

> A young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love.

The grass was springing on the turfy river-bank near which Tim's shop stood; crocusses were pouting their pretty buds in the back garden; large, loose piles of purple and white vapor filled the sky; a robin was twittering on the limb of an old mossy apple tree. Tim's fancy was a little sluggish; but, as he reflected, it seemed to him that in some way he was at variance with the soft, vernal sunshine. He felt older and stiffer in the joints than he had done ten years earlier. There were wrinkles at the corners of his eyes and a liberal sparkling of gray lines in his stiff hair. He thought of 'Mandy, and there came a melting, a softness round his heart. He pictured her as mistress of the little cottage, stepping about and singing at her work. 'Mandy had a good voice for singing, and infused cheerfulness into the very air.

Tim's fancy took another stride, and passed on to a new station. He began to picture little Tims and 'Mandys running and racing and hallooing about the shop and the garden. One little curly-headed elf would persist in peeping around the corner of the door at him, as he briskly used his adze upon a great beer cask. It was nothing but a heap of yellow shavings and a spot of sunshine. Some disturbing element was fermenting in the little cooper's head and heart, and he could work no more that day. He said to himself that "he had it bad." What the "it" was he did not try to explain.

An early hour of the afternoon saw Tim, dressed in his Sunday best, mounted on a hired horse, and wending his way toward 'Mandy's home. He reflected, as he rode along, that it was full two months since he had paid her a visit, owing to the breaking up of a hard winter and the miry condition of the roads. They had never corresponded, and Tim did not possess a single scrap of his lady-love's handwriting. He himself was but a poor scribe. His accounts with the neighboring farmers were chalked up behind the shop-door.

An unusually long period had elapsed since his last visit to 'Mandy. She might have had the influenza, and, in fact, be dead and buried. But Tim did not dread any thing tragical. He was terribly nervous over the task that lay before him, for he remembered that there had never been any outspoken engagement between them. It was a purely tacit affair. Of course, she knew how he felt, and she had more than once given him very reassuring glimpses into her own heart. Tim was at ease on that point; but, for once, he did long for Joshua Holly's gift of gab, that he might do the thing up in proper form, and ask 'Mandy to have him in a neat and workman-like manner. While trying to frame the sentence, he was seized with a shiver. His horse stumbled, but he paid no heed. This was a tougher job than keeping up the staves to drive on the first hoop, and in a state of abstraction he came abreast of Joshua Holly's house, which he must pass to reach the Widow Ainslie's. It was an old frame building, gray and rather dilapidated, standing on a knoll that overlooked the road. Tim was recalled to his senses by the sight of a load of household stuff, surmounted by a feather bed, drawn up before the door, with Widow Ainslie bustling about and giving orders to the driver.

"Do you want to see 'Mandy, Mr. Lathum?" she called to Tim, while a wicked, triumphant gleam shot from her old eye.

Tim checked his horse, opened his mouth to speak, then closed it again, and slowly nodded his head. Amidst the whirl in his brain, he remembered that Josh Holly's mother was half the time bedridden. Probably her neighbors had gone in to minister to her needs.

In a moment 'Mandy came out into the soft spring sunshine. She was dressed in one of her best gowns, a dark blue stuff, which served as a foil to her fair skin and pretty light hair; but her face was pale and her looks troubled. Tim got off his horse and they walked along the grassy roadside together in silence for a few paces.

"'Mandy," said Tim, at last, "I thought I would come over to-day and have a few words with you."

"Then you have heard, Tim?" said she, her mouth trembling and her face looking white.

"No, I haven't heard any thing. I ain't in the way of hearing much. But you know, 'Mandy, we have kept company a long time, and it has come into my mind of late that you and me, being separate staves in the world, we might as well have the hoop up on and be coopered up together. 'Tain't no use making a great talk about it. You know me and I know you, and if you will have me, 'Mandy, I'll try and do the right thing."

There appeared to be a particularly large obstruction in Tim's throat. He was too busy with his own emotions to think of 'Mandy. Suddenly she put her hands before her face and began to sob.

"Oh! Tim, why didn't you speak before? What made you so slow?"

"I didn't think there was any great taking of a hurry, 'Mandy," said Tim, discomfited and hardly knowing why. "I'm a slow man, 'Mandy; slow, but sure. I never thought of any other girl but you; and I've thought of you summer and winter, year in and year out, when I was coopering away at the tubs and buckets. If I hadn't been a dumb creature, like the four-footed beasts of the field, I might have made something fine of all my thoughts about you, 'Mandy; but it seemed as though you must know what was going on within me."

"Don't talk like that, Tim," sobbed the poor girl. "It will just kill me, and it is too late now. Mother was always against you, Tim. She said you was one of them confirmed old bachelors that only wanted a place to run to. She kept at me continually about Josh Holly, and Josh would let me have no peace. Mother was always complaining about the mortgage on the old place. She said I could get her out of trouble and give her a good home for the rest of her days just by saying the word. You have only been over to see me once in five months, Tim. How could I know you meant any thing? Oh! I must tell you; but it will break my heart. They hurried things up. They gave me no rest, and I was married to Joshua yesterday."

Tim felt his knees giving way. The bright spring sunshine turned black before his eyes. There was a sound of rushing and roaring waters in his ears. He came to himself in an instant, and 'Mandy had hold of his arm.

"'Tain't nothing," said he, in a faint voice, unclasping her cold fingers and keeping them for a moment in his own. "Only I'm such a dumb, slow, stupid creeter. I see now I have done you a great wrong, 'Mandy, and I beg your pardon. I didn't mean to," he added, in a half whisper. "I wouldn't have harmed a hair of your head, more than an old mother-bird would knowingly hurt its young ones."

'Mandy stood there deathly pale and rigid. She could not speak a word. There was a contraction in her throat that made utterance impossible, though she longed to cry out and ask Tim's forgiveness for ever having doubted him.

Tim had climbed feebly upon his horse again and turned him round, heading toward home. "Good-by, 'Mandy," said he, in a husky, strange tone, giving her a last look. "I shan't see you again; but I shall always think of you and wish you well."

'Mandy watched him in a kind of stony despair, as he rode slowly away, looking almost decrepit, for the little cooper had grown old in an hour.

From that day Tim was a changed man. He could not define the trouble that had come upon him or hardly frame a thought about it. The bottom of the universe seemed to have fallen out, letting the staves tumble into a chaotic pile. 'Mandy was gone out of his life, and now for the first time he realized how large a portion of his being the thought of 'Mandy and the hope of some day making her his wife had filled. Existence had lost its savor and seasoning. The pleasantness he had vaguely felt turned to a blank and a weariness. He grew listless and indifferent to the things that had once seemed of prime importance. For hours together he would remain seated on a low stool, with his head buried in his hands. Once or twice he passed the night in this way, without taking note of time.

Tim's name had always been a synonym for business promptness; but now things were sadly changed. The adze and hatchet were idle for days together. There were fifty barrels to make for a neighboring brewer, and when the time came round he had not touched one of them. Tim had no bad habits. He neither smoked nor drank. He had never given Mrs. Dodd, with whom he took his meals, the least trouble about his food. He was the most inoffensive and gentle of mortals.

The great disappointment at first seemed to produce in Tim a mental palsy. His faculties were numb. He could not turn them to outward things. A sense of loss filled and overwhelmed him; but by and by there were vague openings in the thick mist that shrouded his senses. He realized that 'Mandy was lost to him forever. He groped about in darkness for the old hope; but did not find it. She would never be queen of the white cottage. No little Tims and 'Mandys would ever frolic and chase each other about the garden and the shop. The main stay of his life was gone; but gradually he opened his eyes upon the world, and unstopped his ears, to listen to its voices.

The view from the shop-door was very lovely. It was in the full glory of its summer dress. The clear, bright little river ran swiftly past, flashing like melted diamonds in the sunshine. The green shore sloped down in soft curves to kiss the bright wavelets, and there were thickets of bushes mingled with wild flowers along the bank, all alive with birds. Out in the middle of the river a little island had rooted itself, and was crowned with a tuft of feathery trees; and beyond rose blue hills, lapping and folding delightful shadows and gleams of sunlight in their curves.

Tim would sit for long hours at the door, with a vague feeling of wonder, as if seeing and hearing had just been given to him. He felt that he had always been like the dumb beasts of the field, that chew the cud and look straight before them, perceiving nothing. If it had not been for his dumbness and his blindness he never would have wronged 'Mandy, leaving her to cling to a vain hope until her heart fainted within her.

In those long summer days the little cooper had ceased to work, save in a fitful way, beginning what never would be finished. The neighbors talked about him, shook their heads, and called him "half cracked." He lived in the shop, sleeping in the bedroom at the rear, and for whole days together communicated with no human being. When he forgot to go to his meals, over at the cottage, kind little Mrs. Dodd would carry his food to the shop; and, finding him in a state of deep abstraction, would set it down softly and go her way without speaking. In her heart she believed that Tim's wits had gone astray.

It was in these days when his senses were quickened and his mind emerging from its torpor that Tim began to feel strange new yearnings for expression. He lay awake half the night and listened to the lisping and babbling of the little river, to the sound of wind in the trees, to the music of rain-drops on the roof. He perceived that even the inanimate could speak, while he was dumb; and, with a sense of his own abasement and incompleteness, he shed bitter tears that soaked into his lonely pillow.

With this new chord vibrating in him, it occurred to Tim that he might chalk up something behind the shop-door, where he had formerly made record of his tubs and barrels. He was no scholar, and had attended the district school only a few months in his boyhood. The teacher rated him a dunce. He had never written above two letters in his life; and it is safe to say that he was a worse speller than George Washington. But this new life that was throbbing in him must find vent. He yearned to ally himself with the vocal and articulate side of creation. So he would stand for half an hour together, with the chalk in his fingers, his elbows squared, his bushy brows knitted, and the hair raising in a tempest upon his head, trying to disentagle the confused snarl of his impressions and feelings. Sometimes he painfully traced a few lines on the wall, which he was careful to smear out again at once; but generally, as no words would come, he put down the chalk in despair.

One day Tim listened to a bluebird singing in a tree near the shop in a happy little warble. The song seemed to sing into his heart as no music ever had done before. He ran to the place behind the door; for surely he could chalk up something now, while the music was still quivering in his ears, and wrote, with considerable swiftnes, one line:

> A blew burd set on a cherry-tree lim.

Tim looked at it with proper pride. It was the first he had ever achieved. He had some dim notions about poetry. He knew there was a word that would rhyme with "lim" and make a pretty couplet. Was it slim? No; the bluebird wasn't slim. It was plump and fat. Tim's poetry, if he made any, must square with the truth, and be as genuine as his tubs and buckets. He did not rub out that line. It was beautiful in his eyes. He went often to look at it, and stood contemplating the effort of his genius for minutes together. From time to time he chalked up other lines of the same nature; but none of them so much resembled an inspiration as this about the bluebird.

He had ceased to go at all to the cottage now, and Mrs. Dodd came regularly with his meals. She brought him needful changes of clean linen and attended to his bed; and then escaped quickly from the shop, often without speaking a word to Tim, who seldom seemed conscious of her presence.

"Poor soul!" said she to a neighbor, with a tear gathering in her kind eyes. "He always would go a long piece out of his way to avoid speaking; and now there's a crack here," touching her forehead, "it's worse than ever. It's all along of 'Mandy Holly, they say—she that was Ainslie; and I don't dare to tell him that 'Mandy has lost her baby and has gone into a decline."

This was late in the fall, when the weather was growing cold. There was a stove in the shop; but Tim often forgot to light his fire. A hacking cough came on and he grew singularly feeble. He had strange night-sweats, that left the sheets of his bed quite wet; but he suffered no pain, only once or twice he fainted away.

Then Mrs. Dodd remonstrated. She told him he was very ill, and begged that she might take him over to the cottage, to nurse him. But he would not go. He answered gently that he did not suffer, that he would get strong again when the spring weather came. But the little cooper grew weaker every day, from this painless wasting, and at last he did not leave his bed. His thin face rested upon the pillow, and his wistful eyes looked out beyond the shows of things. At that time, when his mind was weakened by this insidious disease, he heard voices speaking to him—'Mandy's voice, and others long dead; and that little elf-like child figure, with golden hair, he had seen one sunny spirng day playing about the shop-door, came peeping in and flitted around his bed.

On a February night, when his strength was far spent, there came a great fall of snow. Thick flakes dropped from the vast, silent sky and muffled up the world. Trackless and pure and soft as an angel's vestment it lay around the little shop, heaping the window-sill, lining the limbs of trees, padding all things with down, edging all things with pearl. Tim watched it all through the night, and the air to his listening ear seemed full of the flutter and stir of winds.

Early in the morning, when the gray, ghostly dawn came to reveal the picture, he crept feebly out of bed, and with a trembling hand chalked up his last record in the old place:

> I don't owe any body;
> I never cheated any body;
> I never meant to harm any body;
> And I hain't done good to any body.
> I put my trust in Him that said the blind shall see and the dumb shall speak.

His summons had come. He crawled back to bed, and they found him, some hours later, still and lifeless, with a smile on his face and his hands clasped in the attitude of prayer.—*The Independent.*

THE recent suit of Ira Melandy of Bradford, Vt., in which he recovered $5,600 from the town for injuries suffered on the highway, was a singular one in some respects. He claimed that this accident caused paralysis of his legs, so that these were dead so far as movement and feeling were concerned. The defendant attempted to prove that he was shamming. They called in medical experts, stuck pins into his legs, made cuts and applied ammonia and other to them without making him wince or contract his muscles. Some of the physicians testified that such a paralysis was an impossibility, but the jury did not believe that a man could have sufficient nerve to stand such tests if there was any feeling in the members experimented upon. He will probably have to go through all this again, as the case has been appealed.